

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 06370

USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, EG, IS
SUBJ: ICFTU GENERAL SECRETARY'S VISIT TO CAIRO

1. OTTO KERSTEN, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE INTRNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU), AND JOHN
VANDERVEKEN, ICFTU ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY, VISITED
CAIRO TOGETHER LAST WEEK AT THE INVITATION OF SAAD M.
AHMED, PRESIDENT OF THE EGYPTIAN FEDERATION OF LABOR.
VANDERVEKEN, BACK IN HIS OFFICE AFTER A SHORT
POST-EASTER VACATION, ON MARCH 31 PROVIDED THE USEC LABOR
ATTACHE WITH THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF THE TRIP.

2. THE TWO ARRIVED THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 23. VANDER-
VEKEN DEPARTED SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 26; KERSTEN, THE NEXT
DAY, AFTER A MEETING SUNDAY WITH THE EGYPTIAN PRIME
MINISTER.

3. THE MOST IMPORTANT MEETING WAS ONE LASTING ABOUT TWO
HOURS ON MARCH 25 WITH THE FULL 40-MEMBER EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE OF THE EGYPTIAN FEDERATION OF LABOR. NO
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DECISIONS OF ANY SORT WERE TAKEN. ITS CHIEF SIGNIFICANCE,
AS INTERPRETED BY EFL LEADERS TO KERSTEN AND VANDERVEKEN,
WAS THAT "EVERYBODY" SHOWED UP TO MEET WITH THE ICFTU
OFFICIALS, EVEN THOUGH MANY CONSIDERED THE ICFTU
"HOPELESSLY ANTI-ARAB" (IN VANDERVEKEN'S WORDS).
4. AFTER SPEECHES OF WELCOME FROM THE HOSTS, KERSTEN GAVE
A TALK ABOUT THE ICFTU, ITS PRESENT STATUS, AND ITS

POLICIES, PARTICULARLY IN THE PRESENT ECONOMIC CRISIS.
THE RESPONSES, HOWEVER, DEALT NOT WITH INTERNATIONAL
TRADE UNION ISSUES BUT WITH THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS.

5. THE DISCUSSION, AS VANDERVEKEN ANALYZED IT, INDICATED
THE EGYPTIAN FEDERATION IS NOT A MONOLITHIC ORGANIZATION.
THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SEEMED TO BE DIVIDED IN TWO MAIN
GROUPS: ONE, HEADED BY THE PRESIDENT, WHICH WANTED TO
DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH THE NON-COMMUNIST WORLD; ANOTHER,
WHICH WAS HESITANT ABOUT SUCH RELATIONS.
6. SPEAKERS FROM BOTH GROUPS EXPRESSED THEIR WELCOME TO
THE ICFTU VISITORS, BUT A VOCAL MEMBER OF THE SECOND GROUP
PROPOSED THAT THE COMMITTEE AND THE ICFTU VISITORS ADOPT
A JOINT RESOLUTION CONDEMNING ISRAEL FOR IGNORING NOT ONLY
UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS BUT ICFTU RESOLUTIONS AS WELL.
7. PRESIDENT SAAD THEN STEPPED IN TO RULE THE RESOLUTION
OUT OF ORDER. "THE MOST WE CAN AGREE UPON AT THIS TIME,"
HE SAID, "IS ON ONE SENTENCE--THAT WE HAVE SEEN EACH
OTHER." IN A SMALLER MEETING THAT INCLUDED LEADERS OF THE
AGRICULTURAL AND TEXTILE UNIONS, THERE WAS ALSO AN
AGREEMENT TO "KEEP IN TOUCH"--AT ILO SESSIONS, FOR
EXAMPLE. MOREOVER, THE ICFTU IS TO KEEP THE EGYPTIAN
FEDERATION INFORMED ON "TECHNICAL" MEETINGS TO WHICH, ON
AN AD HOC BASIS, THE EGYPTIANS MIGHT BE INVITED.
8. VANDERVEKEN'S ANALYSIS IS THAT THE VISIT WAS "USEFUL
IN A VERY LIMITED WAY"--TO ESTABLISH DIRECT CONTACT WITH
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DIVERSE ELEMENTS IN THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. HOWEVER,
THE VISIT OCCURRED "AT THE WORST POSSIBLE TIME,"
CONSIDERING THE STATE OF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS,
AND SO THE EGYPTIANS WERE OBSESSED WITH THEIR OWN
IMMEDIATE CONCERNS. VANDERVEKEN CLAIMS THAT HE HAD SENT
FEELERS THROUGH AN INTERMEDIARY, THE EGYPTIAN LABOR
ATTACHE IN GENEVA, TO SEE WHETHER THE TRIP MIGHT BE
POSTPONED, BUT THE ANSWER WAS A FIRM NO. APPARENTLY
IN 1975 THE EGYPTIANS HAD CANCELLED AN INVITATION TO
KERSTEN, AND SO WANTED TO STICK WITH THEIR PLANS.
9. WHY HAD BOTH KERSTEN AND VANDERVEKEN GONE ON THIS
TRIP? BECAUSE THE EGYPTIANS HAD SPECIFICALLY INVITED
A "DELEGATION," AND IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO GET ANOTHER
BOARD MEMBER AT SUCH SHORT NOTICE. MORRIS

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